



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

MAR 31 2004

Ms. Kitty Simonds
Executive Director
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Ms. Simonds: *KTS*

Thank you for your letter of March 12, 2004, regarding the designation process for the proposed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary. In the letter you raised several concerns about the report issued by the Sustainable Resources Group (SRG) that was completed under contract to the National Marine Sanctuaries Program (NMSP). I would like to take this opportunity to again explain the nature and purpose of the report and to explain how it fits into the overall designation process.

The NMSP contracted with SRG to collect and synthesize basic information regarding fishing activities within the NWHI Islands. In addition, they were asked to provide preliminary recommendations about the management of fishing activities in accordance with the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the emerging draft goals and objectives for the sanctuary that are being developed by the Reserve Advisory Council. As part of their information gathering, SRG conducted a series of discussion group meetings and personal interviews with a variety of scientists, natural resource managers, conservation groups, fishers, and agency representatives. In addition, they reviewed the regional fishery management plans as well as scientific literature they felt was relevant.

The conclusions of the report represent the views of SRG and do not represent the views of the NMSP, NOAA or the Department of Commerce. This has been stated in several meetings and conversations with your staff, including at the last Science and Statistical Meeting in February that you referenced in your letter. In addition, the final draft of the SRG report that you refer to is not in fact the final version. It is however, the version that we asked the Reserve Advisory Council subcommittee on fishing to consider final for use in its current work. The



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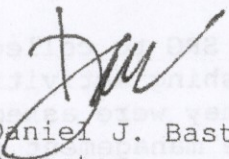


final will contain disclaimer language, and some minor edits. However, we do not anticipate any major changes in content.

The NMSP is using the SRG report as one resource among many to help develop a series of alternative ways to address the issue of fishing activities in the proposed sanctuary. You and your staff as well as many other agency and stakeholder representatives are taking part in the process to lay out a range of management schemes. Several of these possible alternatives will likely include continued fishing in the proposed sanctuary and one alternative will likely explore removing the fishing restrictions imposed by the Executive Orders that established the current coral reef reserve. The next step in the process is to analyze the range of alternatives and based on that analysis determine which approach best meets the purposes of the proposed sanctuary. Currently a request for proposals (RFP) has been issued for that work.

I hope this response addresses some of your concerns. Please feel free to contact me if you need further clarification.

Sincerely,


Daniel J. Basta
Director
National Marine Sanctuary Program

cc: Rebecca Lent, NMFS

P.S. I'll see you on KAWAI NEXT WEEK!